

“Balochistan Case Study”

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INAF 5493-S: Ethnic Conflict: Causes, Consequences and Management

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### **Executive Summary:**

Pakistan's Balochistan province has seen escalating ethnic conflict, sectarian violence and state repressions since 2006. The conflict has its origins in Baloch grievances, irredentism and significant cross border smuggling operations. Escalation of the violence has intensified the ongoing civil-military struggle for control in the nuclear armed nation, and risks spilling over into neighboring states of Iran and Afghanistan. Without greater capacity building for the provincial government, demilitarization and dialogue the conflict risks further destabilizing Pakistan and the region. Progress is limited by the poor relations between western governments and the Pakistani military, as well as the fractious ethnic nature of Pakistani politics. There are three options available for Canadian policymakers: encouraging Baloch economic empowerment, encouraging inter-Baloch dialogue by strengthening Baloch moderates, and finally cooperating with the Pakistani state to improve Baloch-federal relations.

### **Background:**

Balochistan, the largest province in Pakistan, is the site of an armed insurgency by ethnic Baloch demanding autonomy or independence. The conflict dates back to the founding of Pakistan and unsuccessful armed revolts were launched by Baloch in 1948, 1958 and 1973<sup>1,2</sup> The most recent uptick in violence stems from the Pakistani military's killing of Baloch leader, Nawab Akbar Bugti and 35 of his colleagues, in 2006.<sup>3</sup> The Baloch comprise 55% of Balochistan province's 8 million inhabitants (Pashto comprise 30%), two thirds of whom live in rural areas.<sup>4</sup> There are approximately 6.8 million ethnic Baloch in Pakistan.<sup>5</sup> Their ethnic identity is largely rooted in tribal loyalty. Although rich in national resources,<sup>6</sup> Balochistan remains the most economically disadvantaged province in Pakistan,<sup>7</sup> Balochistan has the highest unemployment rate in the country (33%) and the lowest literacy rate (25%).<sup>8</sup>

The Baloch community is politically fragmented, some are satisfied with the status quo while others demand full independence, and still others are simply demanding greater autonomy.<sup>9</sup> The relative power of each faction within the Baloch is unclear, as the main nationalist Baloch parties boycotted the 2008 election.<sup>10</sup> Baloch militants, divided into a number of decentralized armed groups,<sup>11</sup> are partially motivated by the desire for a greater share of the province's resource wealth.<sup>12</sup>

Although Pakistan is a federal state, Baloch autonomy is limited.<sup>13</sup> The Pakistani government, which returned to civilian rule following the election of current President Asif Ali Zardari, remains opposed to Baloch independence.<sup>14</sup> The central Pakistani government is hesitant to offer significant concessions that may raise the specter of separatism amongst other minorities (the Minorities at Risk Project lists six at risk groups in Pakistan).<sup>15</sup> The military still retains considerable political power in the country and the ruling coalition is weak and dependent on the support of ethnic parties.<sup>16</sup> The Punjabi ethnic group dominates the institutions of state and comprises 45% of the population, 90% of the military, and most of the bureaucracy.<sup>17</sup> The Baloch are underrepresented politically and their nationalist political parties have at times been banned.<sup>18</sup> Brahamdagh Bugti, a leading opposition figure and grandson of Nawab Akbar Bugti, was forced into exile after his grandfather was killed.<sup>19</sup>

Of interest to Canada, Balochistan is strategically located at the center of the major drug and gun smuggling corridor between Afghanistan and Iran.<sup>20</sup> The Baloch are spread between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran with several militants groups claiming to be fighting for a 'greater Balochistan' uniting the community living in all three countries.<sup>21</sup> The Baloch have had long standing tensions with the Taliban, Pashto and Afghan refugees.<sup>22</sup> The "Quetta Shura," a group of Taliban leaders and fighters, are based out of the provincial Capital of Balochistan.<sup>23</sup> Canadian mining company Barrick Gold invested heavily in a copper mine in the province, but fell afoul of the provincial government, which revoked Barrick gold's permit and gave the project to a joint Chinese-Pakistani venture.<sup>24</sup> Balochistan is the second biggest supply route for NATO troops in Afghanistan, with over 3,000 NATO trucks passing through the province monthly (up to 12 of which are burned).<sup>25</sup> Smuggling, a wealthy Baloch diaspora in the Gulf States, and extortion from resource extraction companies provides much of the funding for the insurgency.<sup>26</sup> Insurgents have ready access to arms due to regional instability and the province's long border with Afghanistan.<sup>27</sup>

### **Trends:**

The level of violence in Balochistan has been increasing. In 2010 Balochistan “had the highest number of militant, insurgent and sectarian attacks of any province in Pakistan.”<sup>28</sup> In 2011, there were 621 conflict related deaths, the most in a single year since 2006.<sup>29</sup> Government repression of Baloch groups has been increasing, with Human Rights Watch noting that around 300 corpses of disappeared individuals were discovered in 2011.<sup>30</sup> Sectarian violence has been growing,<sup>31</sup> as have demands by ethnic Pashto for the separation of majority Pashto areas from the rest of Balochistan.<sup>32</sup> Finally, the level of violence by Baloch separatists towards Punjabi and other non-ethnic Baloch within the province has become more common (between 2008 and 2010 at least 22 Punjabi teachers were killed).<sup>33</sup> As a result, more than 200 teachers have moved to the safety of Quetta,<sup>34</sup> or outside the province entirely, weakening Balochistan's education system.<sup>35</sup>

Demographic trends are an increasing source of tension. As of 2010, over 400,000 Afghan refugees, mostly ethnic Pashto, remained in Balochistan.<sup>36</sup> They, along with an increasing number of economic migrants, threaten the demographic majority of the Baloch.<sup>37</sup> Consequently there have been increased tensions between Baloch and the Pashto. The Pakistani military has been accused of facilitating sectarian violence within the Baloch community by sponsoring religious fundamental groups as a way of further splintering the Baloch community.<sup>38</sup> A major development in the province is the construction of a deep-water port in the Baloch town of Gwadar by the Chinese, to be largely staffed by non-Baloch workers. It is expected to increase the population of that city from 70,000 to over 2 million.<sup>39</sup> Only 2% of the proceeds of the new port will go to the Balochistan government, and it is an increasing source of tension.<sup>40</sup> Finally, the political outlook remains largely negative. Separatist militant groups and the Pakistani government have been unable to successfully negotiate, with Baloch nationalist largely rejecting mild reforms offered by Islamabad.<sup>41</sup>

The Afghan government has recently started dismantling Baloch militant camps in Southern Afghanistan and forced exiled Baloch leader Brahmdagh Bugti to seek asylum in Switzerland.<sup>42</sup> This has been interpreted as an attempt to get Pakistan to help broker a deal with the Taliban.<sup>43</sup> The killing or ‘disappearance’ of prominent Baloch political leaders has occurred frequently since 2006. The Pakistani military is suspected of being behind the murder of prominent Baloch politicians in 2009,<sup>44</sup> other killings have been attributed to hardline Baloch factions targeting moderate Baloch leaders who are seen as too accommodating.<sup>45</sup>

An independent Balochistan does not appear to be in the interest of any regional or international power.<sup>46</sup> However, the presence of Baloch militants in Afghanistan has been an important part of the relationship between Pakistan and its neighbors. Baloch leaders have actively sought US and Indian support for their movement and received a major boost when a bill was tabled in the US congress expressing support for the groups right to self-determination.<sup>47</sup> Iran has expressed concern that Jondullah, a radical Sunni Baloch group fighting for independence for the Baloch in Iran, has been operating out of Pakistan, which allegedly is receiving support and training from Israel and possibly the United States.<sup>48</sup> However, both the United States and India seem hesitant to openly support a separatist movement in Balochistan given the danger of setting a precedent.<sup>49</sup>

In 2009 the Pakistani government passed the “*Beginning of Right in Balochistan*” package of reforms, which increased the delegation of authority to the Balochistan government,<sup>50</sup> prioritized increased Baloch employment in the civil service, gave the Baloch authority over law and order operations, increased the provincial share of resource revenues, doubled the provincial budget, and called for the release of all Baloch detained without charge.<sup>51</sup> The Pakistani Supreme Court has also taken action, announcing judicial inquiries into the killing of Baloch leaders.<sup>52</sup> The Baloch in the past have responded positively to Pakistani government overtures, with one study finding “that any conciliatory move by the government results in a decline in militant attacks.”<sup>53</sup> However, despite these signs of improvement and conciliatory actions, overall the trend in Balochistan remains more negative than positive. Increased funding in the past has not translated into more projects or infrastructure on the ground.<sup>54</sup> Reforms passed by the central government, due to a highly polarized environment and a lack of human capital, are often not fully implemented by authorities in Balochistan.<sup>55</sup> Despite the announcement

of the reform package, it was recently revealed that since 2008 only one new development project has been started in the province by the federal government.<sup>56</sup>

### **Theoretical Framework:**

Rabia Aslam argues that the ethnic Baloch elite, the “Sardars” use legitimate grievance and the significant financial flows from extortion and smuggling to redistribute wealth to members of their tribe and the broader Baloch ethnic group. Therefore, the conflict is simultaneously a greed, grievance and ethnically motivated conflict.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, attempts to address the conflict without understanding this diversity will not be effective at resolving the conflict.<sup>58</sup>

The conflict itself is made worse by an ongoing struggle between ethnic groups in the Centre and Periphery in the Pakistani state.<sup>59</sup> The ethnic diversity of the Pakistani state and the unstable alliances of ethnic parties have led to shifting alliances between ethnic and sectarian groups and the Punjabi dominated military.<sup>60</sup> This provides an explanation of the alliance between fundamentalist groups and Pashto living in Balochistan, as well as the ongoing struggle between a weak civilian government dependent on ethnic party support and the military. This also underscores the importance of shoring up civilian institutions, as further deterioration in Balochistan could lead to the return of military rule.

The Baloch national movement itself exhibits what Horowitz describes as a ‘convertibility of claims’ as they have moved between a posture of secession and irredentism based on which is most likely to be internationally successful.<sup>61</sup> Previously the movement claimed autonomy from Pakistan. Recently however the irredentist tendency has become more prevalent with increasing demand from a ‘Greater Balochistan’ uniting kin from Afghanistan and Iran into a single state. This irredentist tendency has coincided with greater international attention paid to the situation, deteriorating American-Pakistan relations and ongoing tensions between the United States and Iran.<sup>62</sup>

An empirical study helps explain the failure of the government’s devolution of authority. Bakke and Wibbel’s study on federalism and civil conflict found that high interregional inequality and ethnic concentration increase the likelihood of ethnic conflict. However, in situations where there is high inequality between regions, fiscal decentralization may have an impact in increasing conflict.<sup>63</sup> This can be shown in the current situation in Balochistan where devolution of authority and increased funding to weak institutions has led to an increase in violence.

### **Policy Recommendations:**

Balochistan is important to Canada because of the regional and international dangers that could result from the further destabilization of Pakistan. The Canadian government must work towards stabilizing Balochistan within a united Pakistan. The separation of Balochistan cannot be advocated due to demographic factors (the Baloch form a slim majority in the province), regional actors (Iran and Afghanistan, with their own Baloch populations would be opposed), and political considerations (the Pakistani government, fearful of separatism amongst other minorities, would similarly be opposed). Thus, any policy options must focus on increasing Baloch satisfaction within a united Pakistani state. It is emphasized by all those involved in the crisis in Baluchistan that it is one which could only be resolved through political dialogue, negotiations and through building confidence between the people of Balochistan and the Federal Government. To not act risks Balochistan’s further deterioration, the creation of safe havens for regional terrorist groups (including the Taliban), and the possible spread of instability to other areas of Pakistan and the region. The policy options for the Canadian government are as follows:

#### *Policy Recommendation #1 – Baloch Economic Empowerment:*

Canada, through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) alongside the Balochistan and Pakistan governments, should increase funding for education programs in Balochistan. CIDA’s response to Pakistan’s flooding in 2010, and its continued operations in the area,<sup>64</sup> can provide a basis for its liaison with the local Baloch community. The focus should be on vocational training, particularly in the mining, construction, and transportation sectors to allow the Baloch to more fully benefit from their province’s natural resources. Furthermore, Canada should consider offering assistance to the Pakistani federal and provincial authorities with the aim of increasing adult literacy levels by providing a basic level of education to as many people as possible; this would make the Baloch more employable in the army and bureaucracy. To avoid attacks on personnel, ethnic Baloch teachers should be

used. Any development project in the province should take into consideration the ongoing tensions between the different ethnic communities in Balochistan to avoid making the conflict worse.

Canadian resource extraction firms wishing to operate in the province should be encouraged to provide local vocational programs, along with hiring quotas, to increase the employment of local Baloch. All Canadian firms should be encouraged to give a small fixed percentage of earnings to the local community in which they operate. Increasing the Baloch stake in projects will reduce their incentive to attack mines or transportation, and thus increase the profitability of Canadian firms while similarly increasing employment opportunities for Baloch. A more economically empowered Baloch community will have a greater opportunity cost of conflict, and more incentive to cooperate with developers offering employment and training, encouraging them to peacefully negotiate with other ethnic groups.

*Policy Recommendation #2 - Mediation, Negotiations and Compromise for Peace-Building in Baluchistan:*

The Canadian government should increase funding to local non-governmental organization in Balochistan dedicated to intra-Baloch dialogue, including inter-tribal dialogues between Baloch tribal leaders, civil society groups, and members of the civil service. Baloch leaders need to compromise between their traditional political structures and the process or idea of nationalism. In order to bring all Baloch leaders to the table, Canada should encourage the intervention of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (a group dedicated to promoting inter-Muslim dialogue and reducing conflict), as well as the Baloch diaspora (including those located within Canada), which may help to stress the common religious bonds that the Baloch share with all Pakistanis.<sup>65</sup> Prominent nationalist Baloch tribal leader, Brahanmdagh Bugti and Harbiyar Marri, should meet with their fellow tribal leaders of pro-Pakistani Baloch tribes. The Shahi Jirga, which comprises leaders of the Baloch tribes should be convened and used as a forum to provide unified Baloch political voice. This should temper the positions of more hardline nationalist leaders, as well as provide the Pakistani government with a group of leaders with whom they can negotiate.

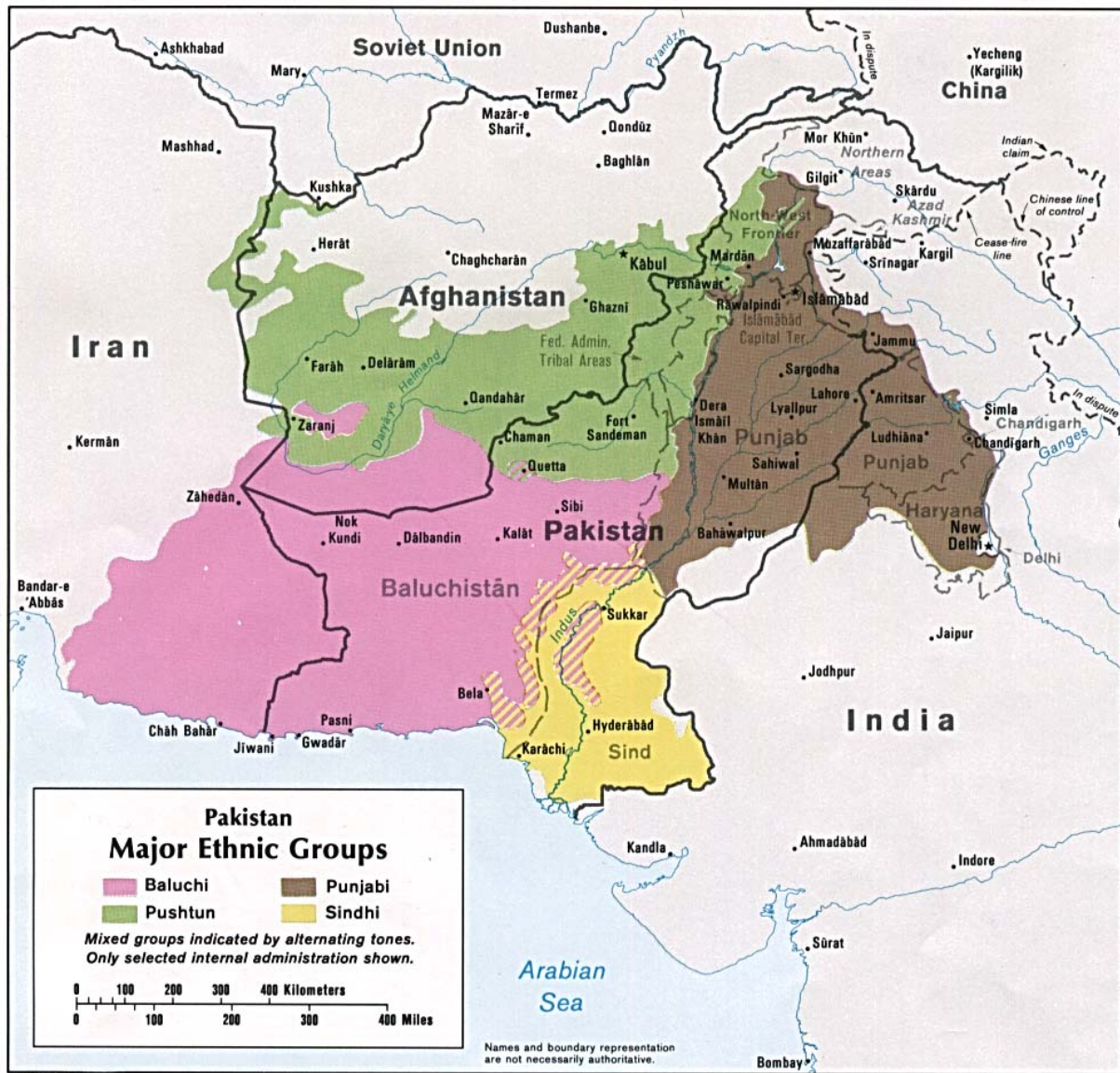
The government of Canada should unequivocally condemn the killing of non-ethnic Baloch civilians, and not offer funding to any groups or organizations that offer any tacit or explicit support to Baloch militant groups. For the Baloch to win legitimacy for their grievances, and improve their political and economic situation, they must as a precondition respect equally the social and economic rights of all residents of Balochistan, irrespective of their language, ethnicity or religion. The killing of non-Baloch citizens must be stopped immediately.

*Policy Recommendation #3 –Pakistani Government:*

Canadian should engage in quiet diplomacy with the Pakistani government. Officials in private should offer advice to their Pakistani counterparts and stress that significant restructuring of Pakistan's federal system is needed to grant autonomy, and greater devolution of power to provinces. Autonomy should be based on the 1973 Pakistan Constitution and the implementation of reforms outlined in the "Beginning of Rights in Balochistan". Advice from NGOs such as the Forum of Federations will provide policy advice to further facilitate this process. Greater inclusion of Baloch is needed in the public bureaucratic structure, as Baloch only comprise 3.5%<sup>66</sup> of the "Secretariat Group."<sup>67</sup> Tax revenues collected by the federal government should be distributed equally among the provinces and the revenue should go to the development projects designed to create employment opportunities and infrastructure projects.

The Canadian government, with the consent of the Pakistan, can provide the expertise in order to train the local civilian police force in the province via the RCMP International Police Operations Branch. Control and the security of the province is a needed pre-requisite to end the hostilities in the region. The Pakistani Army needs to undertake efforts in order to increase the number of Baloch in its organization and restore its reputation with Baloch population. In addition to cadet schools in Quetta, special programmers to target Baloch recruits will contribute to the army's image. Additionally, establishment of an all Baloch security force, under direct supervision of Pakistani Army in conflict areas can act as a confidence building measure.

## Annex I – Map of Pakistani Ethnic Groups:



Source: "The Four Major Ethnic Groups of Pakistan in 1980," *The University of Texas*, accessed June 16, 2012, [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle\\_east\\_and\\_asia/pakistan\\_ethnic\\_80.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/pakistan_ethnic_80.jpg).

**Annex II – Baloch Groups and Structure:**

Organization	Leader	Key Facts	Influence	Recently
<b>Militant Groups:</b>				
Baloch Liberation Army (BLA)	<p>Akbar Khan Bugti (Allegedly-Killed in Pakistan in 2006)</p> <p>Balach Marri (Killed in Action in Afghanistan in 2007)</p> <p>Currently leader (suspected): Harbayer Marri</p>	<p>Base: Afghanistan</p> <p>Banned in Pakistan<sup>68</sup></p> <p>Orientation: Nationalist Militant</p> <p>Goals: Irredentism, Independence of a 'greater' Balochistan (including Iran &amp; Afghan Baloch)</p>	<p>Associated with the Marri tribe. Not banned in Canada, or the United States, but is considered a terrorist organization in the UK. Has claimed responsibility for bombings in Quetta and the killing of settlers.<sup>69</sup> Active since the 1970s when it was allegedly backed by the Soviet Union.<sup>70</sup></p>	<p>After the killing of Akbar Khan Bugti and Balach Marri, the group has kept its leadership secret. The son of Balach Marri is accused of heading the organization.<sup>71</sup> Hyrbyair was accused of inciting terrorism by the UK in 2009, but the charges were dropped.<sup>72</sup> Conducted its first suicide attack in December 2011<sup>73</sup> Estimated to have 3,000 irregular tribal fighters.<sup>74</sup></p>
Baloch Republican Party (BRP)	<p>Brahamagh Bugti<sup>75</sup>, grandson of Akbar Khan Bugti who lived in Afghanistan after the killing of his grandfather. His presence caused tensions between the two governments and he is now seeking asylum in Switzerland, which has no extradition treaty with Pakistan.<sup>76</sup> Pakistan claims he travels on an Indian passport.<sup>77</sup></p>	<p>Orientation: Nationalist political party</p> <p>Goals: Independence of 'greater' Balochistan</p>	<p>One of the largest and most powerful political parties in Balochistan, it takes a hardline and is opposed to any sort of political dialogue. Calls upon the international community to intervene to halt a 'genocide'.<sup>78</sup></p>	<p>In February 2012, the government of Pakistan withdrew outstanding cases against the leaders of the Baloch Republican Party. The party leadership refused to return due to the ongoing-targeted killings of Baloch.<sup>79</sup></p>
Baloch Republican Army (BRA)	<p>Widely assumed to be Brahamagh Bugti<sup>80</sup></p>	<p>Banned militant organization<sup>81</sup></p>	<p>Relatively new. Presumed to be the militant wing of the Baloch Republican Party<sup>82</sup> Associated with the Bugti tribe.</p>	<p>Targets gas pipelines<sup>83</sup> and attacks on military convoys<sup>84</sup> and recently has been able to pull off more sophisticated attacks on paramilitary checkpoints.<sup>85</sup></p>
Sipah-i-Sahaba (SSP) & Lashker-i-Jhangvi (LeJ)	<p>Maulana Luhianvi and Malik Ishaq</p>	<p>Sunni extremist militant groups that are alleged to work together. Founded in the wake of the Iranian revolution as an anti-Shia Muslim movement, it has mostly focused on attacks against Pakistan's Shia minority.<sup>86</sup> Aims to create an Islamic state in Pakistan founded on sharia law.</p>	<p>Alleged to be close to elements in the Pakistani military and security services although it is ostensibly banned. Leaders have free movement and been setting up autonomous cells throughout Balochistan since 2009 and members have killed Shia and Baloch Nationalist leaders. Two of the group's militants escaped from prison under mysterious circumstances, increasing suspicion of complicity.<sup>87</sup></p>	<p>Sharp upsurge in its attacks in the last six months in Balochistan against Baloch Shia and ethnic Hazaras. Alleged to receive funding from Saudi Arabia.<sup>88</sup></p>
Jundallah	<p>Abdolmalek Rigi (executed 2010 in Iran)</p>	<p>Base: Balochistan, Pakistan</p>	<p>Small extremist Iranian Baloch group. Reports that it</p>	<p>After the death of its leader it has continued to be active,</p>



	Current leader: Muhammad Zahi Baloch	Islamic militant organization. States that it is not fighting for a 'Greater Balochistan' only rights of the Iranian Baloch and Sunni population.	has been receiving support from the United States and Israel. Started in 2003, it has been able to conduct several suicide operations against Iranian military and civilians. <sup>89</sup>	but at a lesser level and is estimated to have only about 100 militants at this time. <sup>90</sup>
<b>Political Parties and Civil Society Groups</b>				
Baloch Students Organization (BSO)	Divided between factions that support the BLA, the BNM, NP and the BNP	Base: Balochistan, Pakistan	Student organization that has long been a source of Balochi nationalist leaders. Contains several different factions. Middle class entry point into nationalist movement. <sup>91</sup>	The hardline, BLA aligned BSO-Azad faction appears to be the pre-eminent movement at this time. <sup>92</sup>
Baloch National Front/Movement (BNM)	Ghulam Mohammed Baloch (Died after being detained in 2009) <sup>93</sup>	Base: Balochistan, Pakistan  Nationalist Political party refused to participate in political process  Calls for the independence of 'Greater' Balochistan	The leader of this organization was found dead soon after he helped form the umbrella group 'Baloch National Front' which united several nationalist groups. Many suspect the Pakistani military for his death which drew condemnation from the United Nations. <sup>94</sup>	Movement splintered after his death. Some factions joined the government; others pulled away and joined the insurgency.
National Party (NP)	Abdul Malik Baloch	Base: Balochistan, Pakistan	Centre Left nationalist political party. Represents the Baloch Middle Class. <sup>95</sup> Usually contests provincial polls, but boycotted 2008 polls.	A relatively moderate political party. Unknown assailants have assassinated several leaders of the party. <sup>96</sup>
Balochistan National Party (BNP) <sup>97</sup>	Attaullah Mengal	Base: Balochistan, Pakistan  Calls for increased resource sharing within the Pakistani federal system  Wants a referendum on the future of Balochistan. <sup>98</sup>	Major nationalist political party, previously controlled the provincial government, but boycotted the polls in 2008. Considered moderate.	Family party of the powerful Mengel tribe. Both members of the BNP and NP have been assassinated, either by Baloch separatists or by the government, for attempting to participate in the political process. <sup>99</sup>
Baloch Society of North America (BSO-NA)	Dr. Wahid Baloch	Base: Washington DC  Advocacy, non-violent  Independence of Balochistan (Iranian and Pakistani parts) <sup>100</sup> advocates for an international intervention	Primary Baloch lobby in the United States. Met with US Vice President Biden in 2010. <sup>101</sup> Trying to gain bipartisan support. Receives funding from the Khan of Kalat, who is a descendent of the ruler of the princely state that preceded Balochistan's annexation into Pakistan. <sup>102</sup>	Important part of the lobbying behind the Balochistan bill introduced by Republican Congressman Dana Rohrabacher. <sup>103</sup> Criticized by the Pakistani government as representing the exiled tribal elite. Has about 100 members. <sup>104</sup>



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